

REMARKS

Claim 5 has been cancelled. Claims 1-4 and 6-10 are now in the case.

Claim 1 has been amended to recite the agglomeration binder elements of original Claim 5. Claims 2 and 8 have been amended to delete language which is redundant in view of the amendment to Claim 1. These amendments add no new matter and entry is requested.

Attached hereto is a marked-up version of the changes made to the claims by the current amendment, captioned "**Version with markings to show changes made.**"

REJECTIONS UNDER 35 USC 112

The rejection of Claim 5 has been obviated by the cancellation of that claim. The rejections of Claims 2 and 8 have been overcome by the above-noted amendments. Reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections are requested.

REJECTIONS UNDER 35 USC 103

Claims 1-10 stand rejected over U.S. 5,486,317 and Claims 1-4 and 7-10 stand rejected over WO 97/32954 for reasons of record. Applicants respectfully traverse all rejection, to the extent they may apply to the amended claims now in the case.

To be brief, the present invention employs an agglomeration binder in the form of discrete mass units within a defined size range. As noted in the specification, the result is the formation of a detergent agglomerate having a significantly narrower particle size range, with minimal amounts of overs and fines. (Page 13, lines 14-16.) It is clear that neither '317 nor WO '954 teaches or suggests this key aspect of the present invention. Indeed '317 refers to its binders as "liquid ingredients" (col. 5, par.1). WO '954's abbreviated disclosure of binders (page 5, par. 1; page 13, final par.) in no way suggests the binder parameters herein. Accordingly, it is submitted that neither reference, alone or in combination, teaches or suggests the present invention in the sense of 35 USC 103. Withdrawal of all rejections over these references is requested.



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VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

1. (amended) A continuous process for preparing a granular detergent agglomerate having a density of at least about 500 g/l, comprising the steps of:

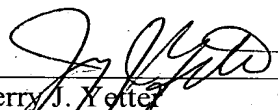
- (a) in a first step, dispersing and mixing a liquid acid precursor of an anionic surfactant with a solid particulate water-soluble alkaline material in a high speed mixer for a mean residence time of about 0.2 to about 50 seconds, wherein the acid precursor is partly or totally neutralized, thereby forming a dry neutralized material comprising a salt of the anionic surfactant precursor in the form of a free-flowing powder; and
- (b) in a second step, dispersing and mixing an agglomeration binder with the free-flowing powder in the mixing zone of a moderate speed mixer, said agglomeration binder being dispersed in the mixing zone as discrete mass units having an average equivalent diameter of from about 0.5 to about 4mm, thereby agglomerating the powder into granular detergent agglomerates.

2. (amended) A process according to claim 1 wherein the moderate speed mixer is operated at conditions of (i) from about 20 to about 600 seconds of mean residence time, (ii) from about 0.5 to about 5 m/s of tip speed for a mixing tool mounted within the mixing zone, and has cutting elements operating at a tip speed of at least 3 m/s [to disperse the viscous surfactant paste as discrete mass units of agglomeration binder].

8. (amended) A process according to claim 1 wherein the dry neutralized material is further mixed with an optional liquid and particulate detergent ingredients in an optional intermediate mixing step, before passing as the free-flowing powder into the [agglomeration] mixer of the second step.

In light of the amendments to the claims and the above remarks, it is requested that the Examiner reconsider and withdraw all rejections and pass all claims now in the case to allowance.

Respectfully submitted,



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